

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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WHOOPEE EGGS HATCH SUCCESSFULLY; UDALL HAILS ACHIEVEMENT

All whooping crane eggs taken from the Canadian wilds late in May have hatched successfully at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md., Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall announced today. He called it a "major success in man's battle to preserve this rare bird."

The cooperative expedition involving the Canadian Wildlife Service and Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife resulted in the removal from nests of nine whooper eggs and one newly hatched whooper. A record number of 22 cranes are now in captivity, and more may be on the way in coming weeks.

In 1941, only 15 whoopers came to their winter home at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, but conservation efforts have reversed the tide.

Gradual increases brought the wild whooper population to a record 48 last fall. The dramatic increase in the numbers of captive cranes has come in the past two years. Four young whoopers were raised successfully at Patuxent a year ago following the first egg-hunting expedition ever attempted to the nesting grounds near the Arctic Circle.

The captive stock will increase further if eggs produced by a mating pair at the San Antonio Zoo produce live young. The zoo is artificially incubating one of the eggs, another was left under the birds, and three were shipped to Patuxent. Two of the Patuxent eggs from this pair proved infertile; the third will hatch, if it does, late in June.

A baby was hatched successfully by the pair last summer at San Antonio and is being reared at Patuxent. Also at Patuxent is "Canus," a crippled whooper found by Canadian biologists in 1964. In addition, four captive whoopers are at the Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans.

Dr. Ray Erickson, Patuxent's assistant director, and Glen Smart of the Patuxent staff cradled incubators on their laps on the return flight from Canada.

Erickson said the new born whoopers are doing fine. "They are taking food well and we are making every effort to insure their normal development," he said.

The baby whoopers are being fed live mealworms and game bird mash. Natural greens are available during outdoor exercise periods. In about a month mealworms will be discontinued, and growing mash will replace starter mash. In addition, they will be able to choose from a selection of mixed grains.

Adult whooping cranes subsist chiefly on insects, mice, crabs, frogs, grains and other vegetable matter.

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